

# ***EPA's Work in the Bristol Bay Watershed***

Presentation for Office of Federal Activities  
January 31, 2018

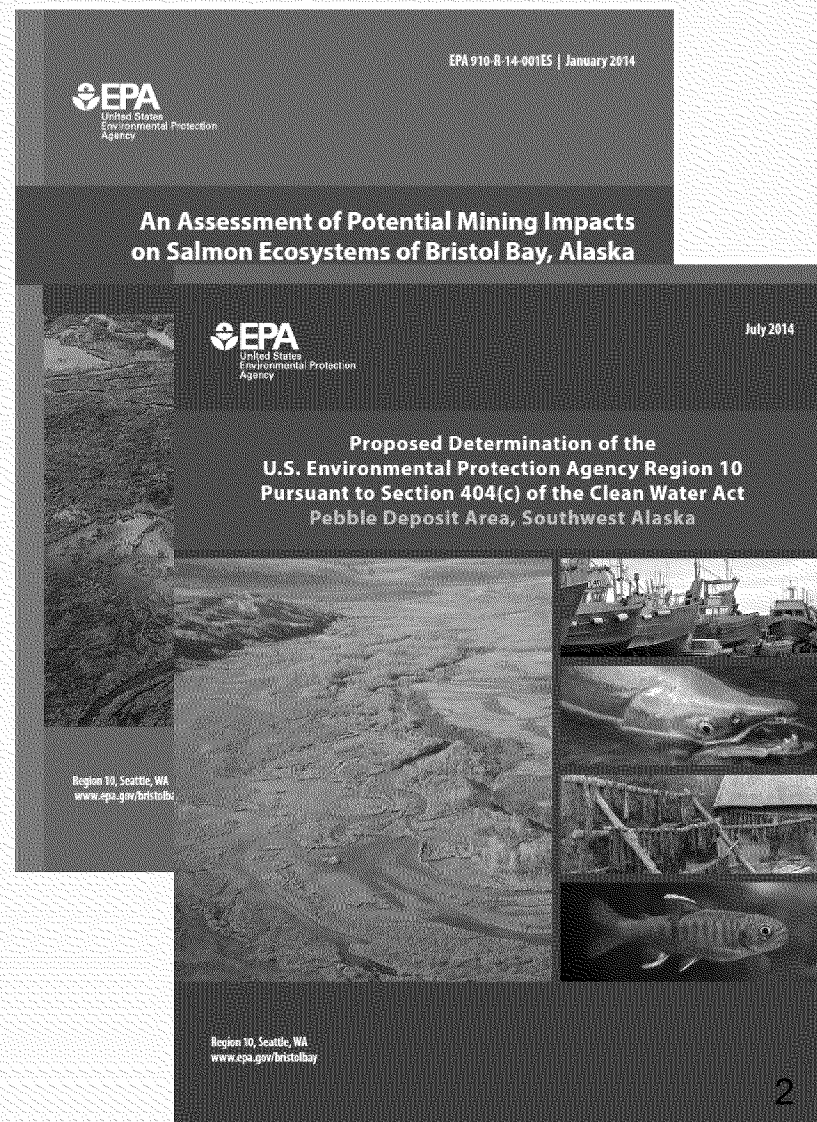


# Overview



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- EPA's Involvement History
- Science
- Section 404(c) Regulatory Response
- Section 404 Permitting

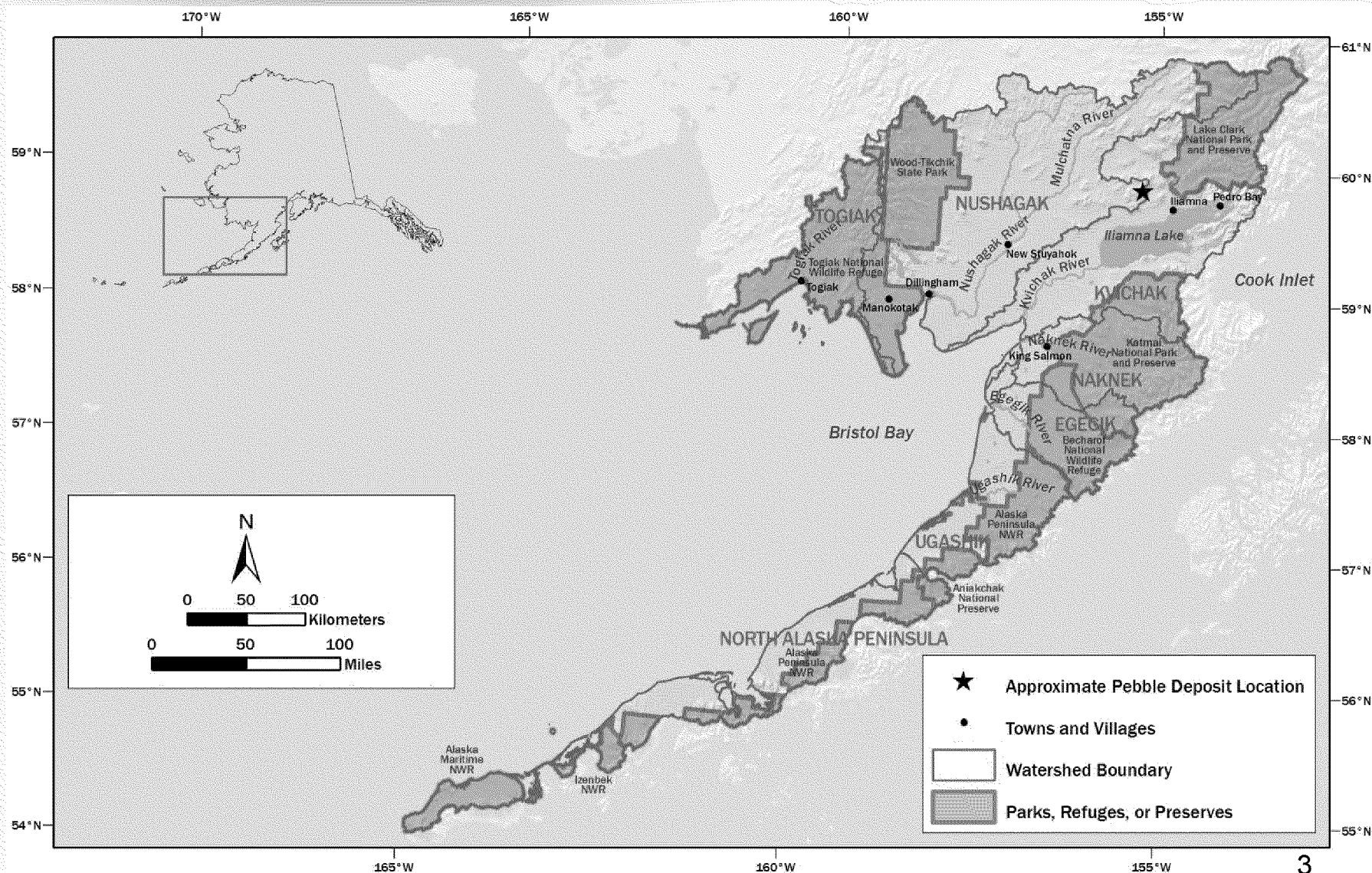




# Bristol Bay Watershed



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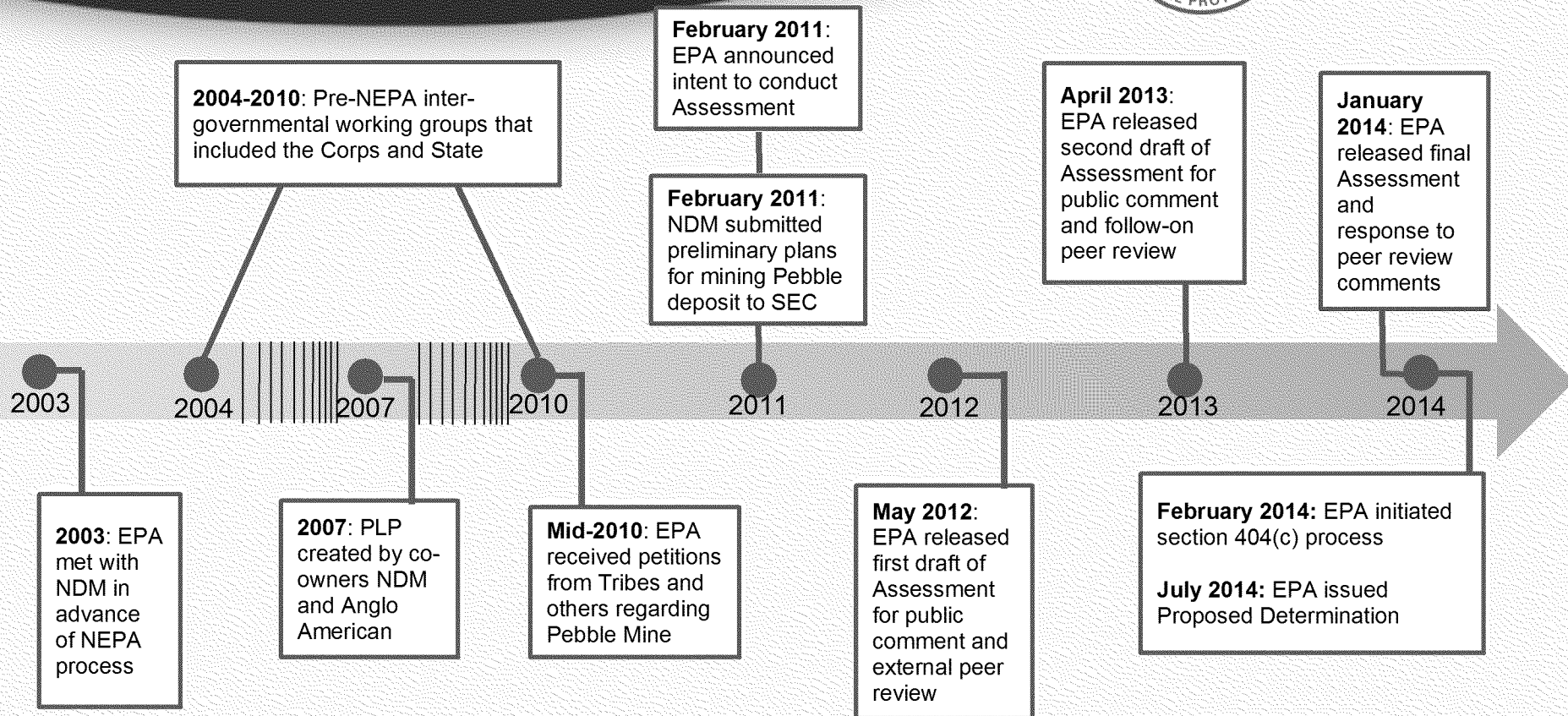




# Timeline 2003 - 2014



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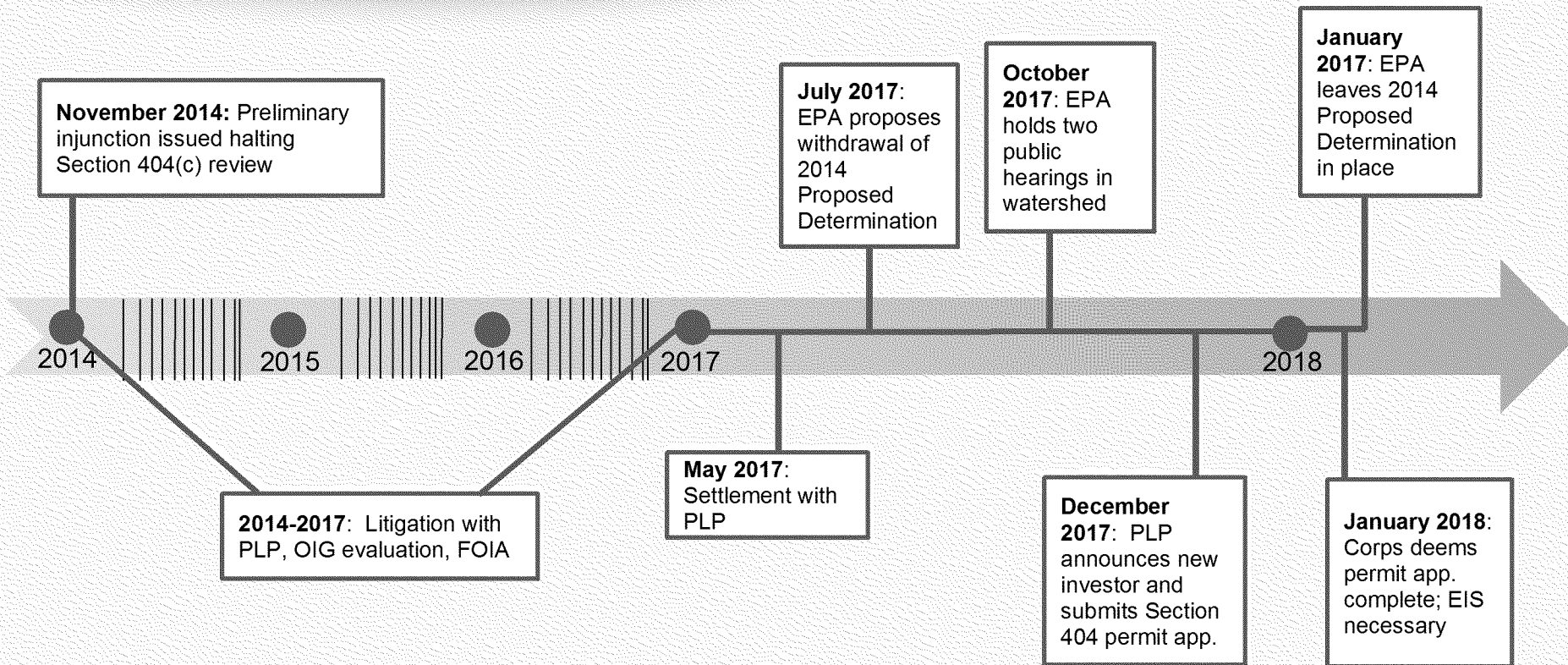
NDM = Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd.  
PLP = Pebble Limited Partnership  
NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act  
SEC = U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission



# Timeline 2014 - Present



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OIG = EPA Office of Inspector General  
PLP = Pebble Limited Partnership  
Corps = U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
EIS = Environmental Impact Statement

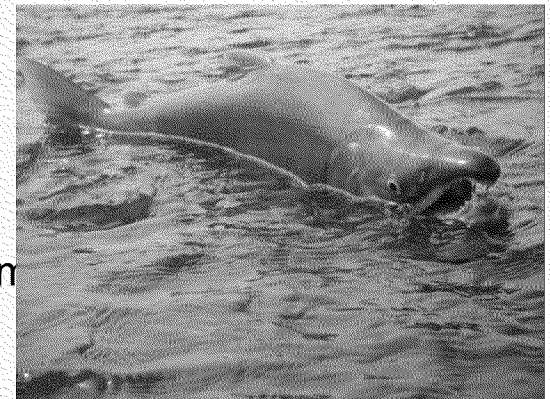


# Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment



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- **Purpose:**
  - Characterize the biological and mineral resources of the Bristol Bay watershed
  - Increase understanding of the potential impacts of large-scale mining on the region's fish resources
  - Inform future decision-making
- **Scientific Ecological Risk Assessment evaluating potential impacts associated with:**
  - Large-scale mine construction and operation
  - Accidents and failures
- **Three-year scientific assessment effort**
  - Independent external peer review
  - Stakeholder and public engagement
    - 8 public meetings
    - 2 rounds of public comment – over 1.1 million comments
  - Tribal consultations





# Bristol Bay Watershed Resources



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## Biological Resources:

- Bristol Bay produces almost half of world's sockeye salmon
- Kvichak watershed world's largest producer of sockeye salmon
- Nushagak watershed frequently at or near world's largest producer of Chinook salmon

## Biological Resources Support:

- 14,000 jobs, generates \$480 million annually in direct economic expenditures and sales
  - Salmon fishery valued at \$1.5 billion annually
- 4,000-year-old subsistence fishery for Alaska Natives

## Geological Resources:

- At least 10 claims with more than minimal exploration, including Pebble.
- Pebble deposit: low-grade, with copper, gold, and molybdenum
- According to NDM, Pebble could:
  - Be largest mine of its type in North America
  - Produce 3,000 jobs in AK
  - Contribute \$2.7 billion to US GDP annually
- Economics of mining the Pebble deposit are speculative
- Since 2001, four major mining companies have walked away from Pebble project



# Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment



- Mining scenarios informed by NDM plans submitted to U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 2011
- Uses 3 potential stages of mine development at Pebble deposit
  - 0.25-billion-ton mine (worldwide median size porphyry copper deposit)
  - 2.0-billion-ton mine (smallest mine size proposed by NDM to SEC)
  - 6.5-billion-ton mine (largest mine size proposed by NDM to SEC)
- NDM says deposit is nearly 12 billion tons



# Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment



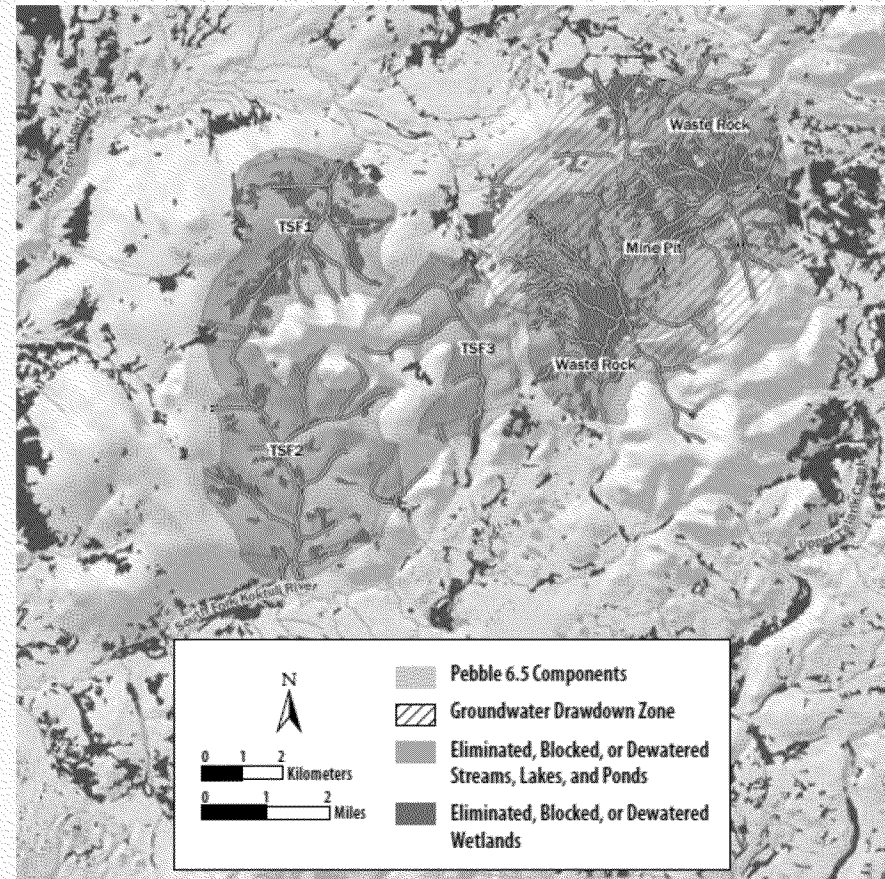
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## Mine Footprint Impacts:

- 24-94 miles of salmon-supporting streams destroyed
- 1,300-5,350 acres of wetlands, ponds, lakes destroyed
- 9-33 miles of salmon-supporting streams with altered streamflow likely to affect ecosystem structure and function

## Other Impacts:

- Tailings dams need maintenance in perpetuity
- Routine operations and accidents would increase impacts on salmon habitat quality, both at the mining site and along the 86-mile transportation corridor.





# Clean Water Act Section 404



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- §404(a) authorizes the Secretary of the Army to issue **permits**
  - For the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. at specified disposal sites
- §404(b) directs the Secretary of the Army to apply **environmental criteria** developed by EPA when specifying disposal sites
  - §404(b)(1) Guidelines [40 CFR Part 230]
- §404(c) authorizes EPA to prohibit, deny or restrict (withdraw) the placement of dredged or fill material at defined sites in waters of the U.S.



# Limits of Section 404(c)



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- **Whenever** it determines, after notice and opportunity for public hearing, that the discharge of such materials into such area will have an **unacceptable adverse effect(s)** on:
  - Municipal water supplies; or
  - Shellfish beds and **fishery areas**; or
  - Wildlife; or
  - Recreation areas.





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EPA-5178-0001629



# What Are the Proposed Restrictions?



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Restrict the discharge of dredged or fill material related to mining the Pebble deposit into waters of the U.S. that would, individually or collectively, result in the following:

1. **Loss of Streams.**
  - a. The loss of 5 or more linear miles of streams with documented anadromous fish occurrence; **or**
  - b. The loss of 19 or more linear miles of streams where anadromous fish are not currently documented, but that are tributaries of streams with documented anadromous fish occurrence; **or**
2. **Loss of Wetlands, Lakes, and Ponds.** The loss of 1,100 or more acres of wetlands, lakes, and ponds contiguous with either streams with documented anadromous fish occurrence or tributaries of those streams; **or**
3. **Streamflow Alterations.** Streamflow alterations greater than 20% of daily flow in 9 or more linear miles of streams with documented anadromous fish occurrence



# Response to Section 404(c) Proceeding



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- **Office of Inspector General (OIG) Review**
  - 17-month in-depth evaluation found no evidence of bias or a pre-determined outcome
  - Possible misuse of position for retired Region 10 employee noted
- **PLP broad Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests**
  - Approximately 18,000 documents produced
- **PLP filed three lawsuits in 2014**
  - Administrative Procedure Act (APA) challenge to initiation of 404(c) process
  - FOIA litigation
  - Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) litigation
- **May 2017 settlement agreement**
  - Resolved FOIA and FACA litigation and PLP's outstanding FOIA requests



# Settlement Agreement



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- Key terms of the May 11, 2017 settlement agreement between PLP and EPA:
  - EPA may use its Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment without limitation
  - EPA agrees to initiate a process to propose to withdraw its 2014 Proposed Determination by July 11, 2017
  - EPA agrees not to forward a Recommended Determination (the next step in the 404(c) review process) to EPA HQ until a Final EIS is noticed for the project or May 11, 2021, whichever is earlier
  - PLP drops remaining lawsuits and fee requests against EPA and agrees to file no new FOIA requests during the 2.5- to 4-year hiatus period

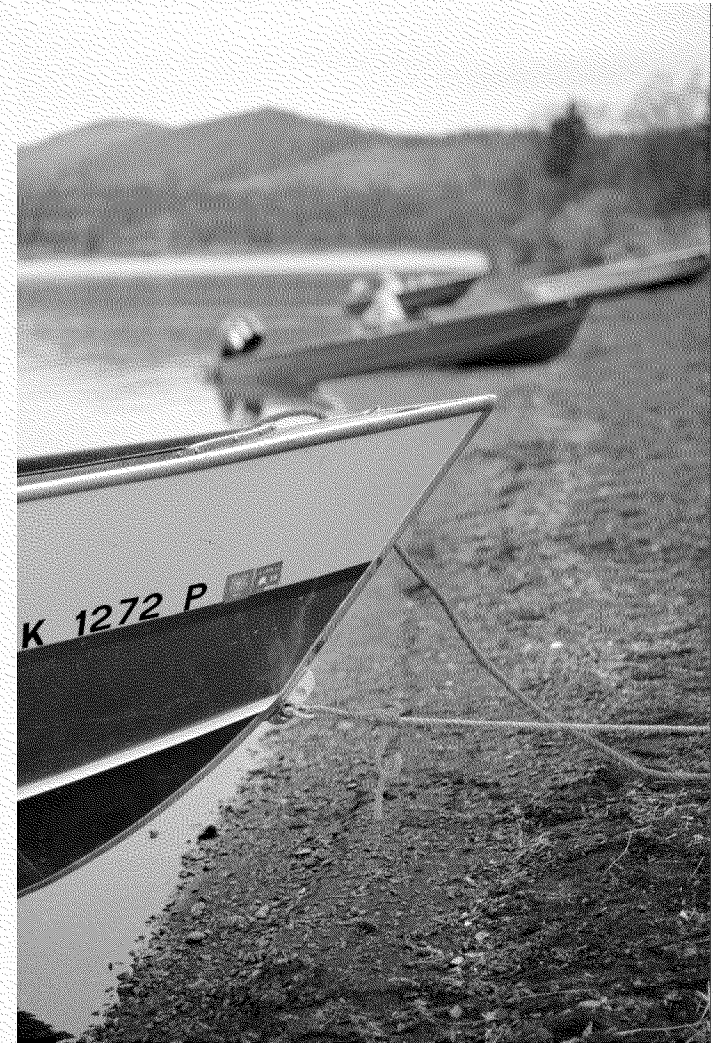


# Proposal to Withdraw 2014 Proposed Determination



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- July 2017: Withdrawal proposed based on policy rationale
  - EPA did not solicit comment on the proposed restrictions or on science or technical information underlying the Proposed Determination
- Outreach and Consultation
  - Proposal generated >1 million comments (~99% opposed)
  - 2 public hearings in watershed
  - Tribal and ANCSA Consultation
    - 16 tribal governments and 1 ANCSA Regional Corp. opposed
    - 1 tribal government and 2 ANCSA Village Corps. supported





# Section 404(c) Next Steps



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- EPA decided not to withdraw and suspended Section 404(c) process pending further review
- Settlement agreement obligations
  - EPA can issue a new/modified Proposed Determination at any time
  - EPA Region 10 cannot forward a Recommended Determination to EPA HQ until May of 2021 or until a final EIS is noticed, whichever comes first



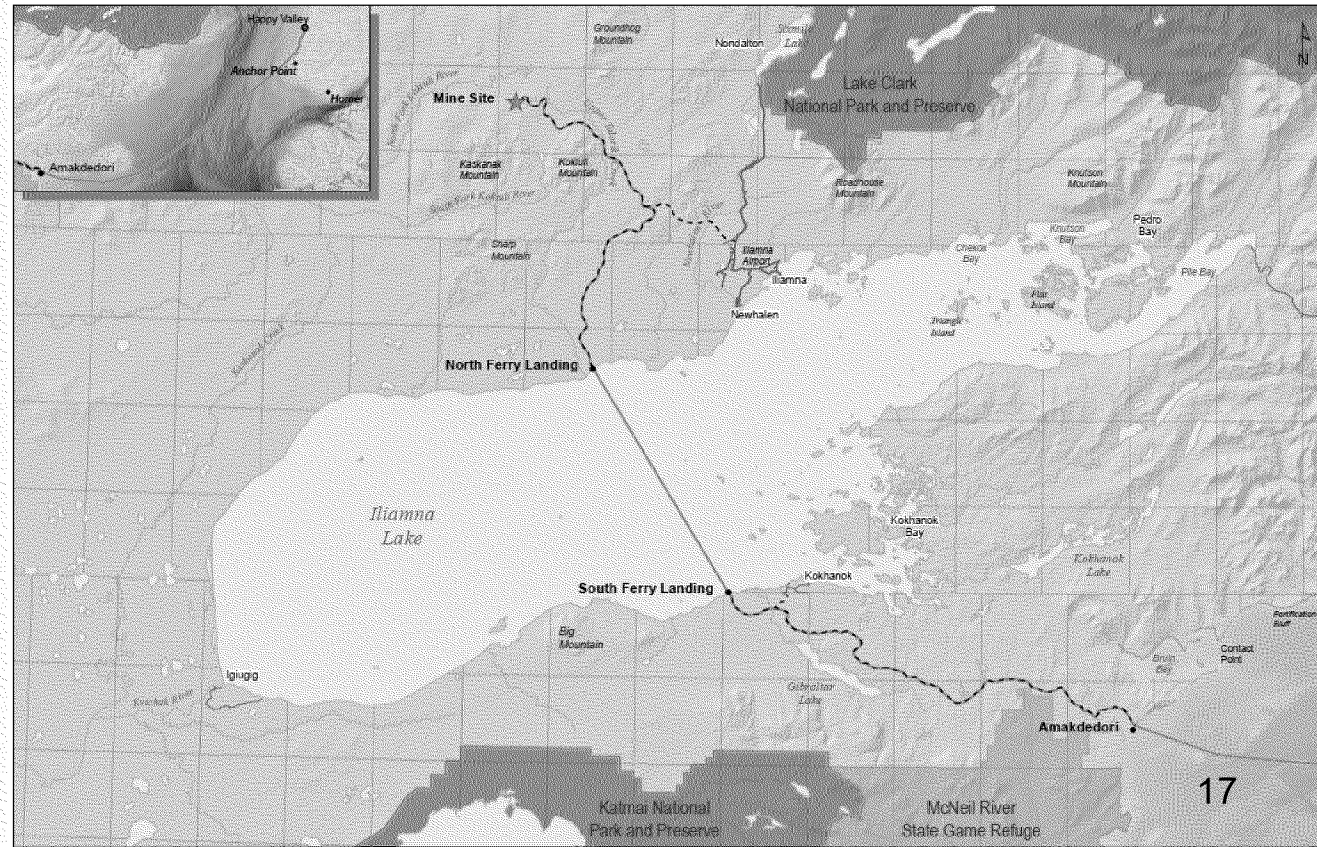


# Section 404 Permit Application



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- PLP filed permit application in December 2017
- Corps deemed permit application complete; EIS is necessary
- Timing
  - Final EIS mid-2020
  - FAST-41



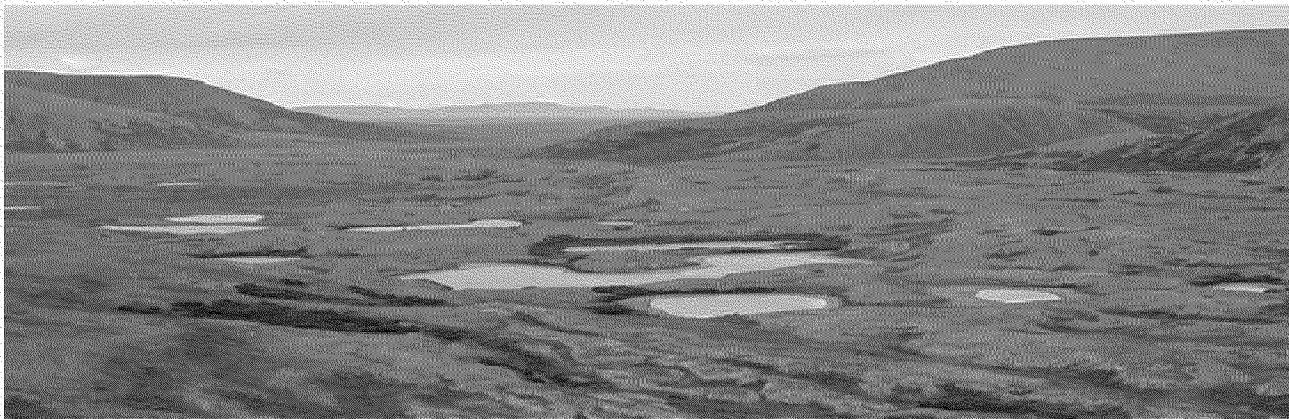


# Initial Corps Process



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- Corps invited EPA to cooperate
  - Currently proposing to limit EPA's involvement to Section 404(b)(1) issues
  - Framework for coordination is atypical
  - No commitment to preliminary draft EIS
- EPA requested higher-level meeting to discuss concerns



Pebble deposit area.



# Questions



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Upper Talarik Creek, one of three streams flowing from the Pebble deposit site